2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

779 thought. He is a man-become-deity (though there is no pantheon where he could find a niche), a national hero turned into an 773 ancestral being (though again, there are no named ancestors to whose ranks he might be added). Tsoede is the ancestor only of a line of kings; but in a wider and vaguer sense all Nupe within the kingdom regard themselves with pride as his 'offspring', in the sense, that is, that they were born in a country he founded and made great and come of stock which, originally, lived under his rule and supernatural protection. This protection, which still endures, bears on certain problems of life which are resolved also by means of other rituals or appeals to *Sokó*, namely, the ubiquitous problems of illness and fertility. But these are only incidental effects of Tsoede's mystic power; its main efficacy used to bear on political interests—the maintenance of the 'king's law', the punishment of criminals, and the protection of the 'King's Highway' on the river Niger.[1] Even the 'incidental effects' of the Tsoede cult are bound up with political interests, being embodied in material objects which are at the same time the paraphernalia of secular power. Let me only mention the 'Chain of Tsoede', which is believed to cure the sterility of women but which was formerly also used to strangle political offenders and to uncover crimes in the manner of an ordeal.

[182] In brief, the Tsoede cult is essentially a State religion superimposed upon a pre-existing creed. The cult ties the people to supernatural benefits granted not simply by God, nor by a God who commands his own rituals, but by a God who listens to kings. And its rituals, no longer 'owned' by communities or kin groups, are aligned with the growth and pride of a nation.

5. THE NUPE COSMOS

779 I spoke before of the supererogatory character of certain Nupe beliefs. In a sense, the greater part of Nupe doctrine has this 772 character. Consider that the Nupe hypothesize a deity who creates the world and then leaves it to itself—uncertain, full of obscurity and accident, and embracing good and evil in entirely fortuitous measure. With such a conception of the relationship between God and the world, the Nupe need not have speculated further about some deeper meaning behind the features of the universe. Anything that exists or happens in it would be sufficiently explained by that key concept of an aloof and non-ethical deity. One might, for example, imagine a religion starting from the same premisses which would leave all further explanations to the crude realism of naïve common sense. Whether so unambitious a theo-

[1] See my article on the 'King's Hangmen' in *Man*, 1935, 143.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

logy is ever likely to arise, I will not venture to discuss. The point is that Nupe theology is more ambitious; the Nupe do speculate further, and reckon with a great many additional (or 'supererogatory') existences and influences. They seem to feel the need to do justice to the particular features of the world by means of particular conceptions, over and above its broad justification in terms of divine creation.

This proliferation of thought is, of course, not peculiar to Nupe religion, though we may note that the Nupe ignore many 'particular' features which other religions feel compelled to acknowledge and elaborate. Thus the Nupe find nothing to explain about the heavenly bodies, do not concern themselves specifically with lightning, thunder, or rain, and speculate only vaguely about animals or natural features. Instead, their attention is focussed upon health and disease, birth and death, fertility, misfortunes, dreams, that is, upon things human. The Nupe elaboration of the universe, we might say, is anthropocentric.

Yet it concentrates on natural man, not on the moral being. Again it neglects all features which might serve this kind of conception, such as an after-life promising reward or retribution, or natural catastrophies that might signify divine anger or warning. Even where the ethical interpretation suggests itself forcibly it is ignored; thus the metamorphosis of the soul stands apart from any ethical design; the powers of good and evil spirits descend on man at random, and the success or failure of supernatural appeals, to ancestors or even to God, do not reflect upon the moral worthiness of the suppliants. There are a few vague notions of divine retribution. Thus it is admitted, but never spontaneously vouchsafed, that incest is punished by barrenness and blindness, and that persons guilty of concealed crimes may be punished by the *kuti* (in an unspecified manner) or killed by lightning (in the case of theft). But these half-hearted concessions do not alter the picture of a creation devoid of moral purpose.

Are, then, all the 'additional influences' which the Nupe read into creation and all their 'further speculations' merely attemps to 'do justice to the particular things in the world', and no more? It may well seem so. There seems to be no other, ulterior, motive behind the readiness to ascribe the contrariness of a tree or the uncanniness of a locality to spirits rather than to nature just-so created; behind the belief that certain ailments betray the machinations of spirits or witches over and above the weakening of the *anima*, and perhaps natural causes; or behind the subdivision of mental afflictions, which are traced to spirits, to the vagaries of the body, and to God. But consider also that these diverse explanations are not kept apart, by some economical parcelling-out of the universe:

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

normal. The actual disease materializes when the two forms happen to be combined in the same person, and the prospects of a cure depend on which 'germ', male or female, is the stronger. Predominantly male leprosy is curable, predominantly female leprosy, fatal. In the case of sleeping sickness everything depends on the treatment, though the prospects are bleak in either case; if a *cigbe* expert succeeds in killing the male 'germ' only, the disease will take its fatal course; in the opposite case death at least will be avoided, though another incurable disease, lunacy, will result.

This is once more a half-hearted vindication of divine providence; all it attempts to prove is that creation is not necessarily evil and that evil things slip into it by chance. Fundamentally, the whole Nupe universe is thus ruled by accident. Such benevolent design as is discernible in it is all too vulnerable and all too easily vitiated by the coexistence of evil. Yet neither are evil and malevolence more securely established. It is true that there is no real struggle between the two, as between opposed wills or destinies, but only the casual share-out of fortunes and misfortunes. Even so there are grounds, if not for an inspiring faith, yet for its cruder version, optimism. And to this, as we shall see, the Nupe firmly cling.

This is not, however, the whole picture. Our view of Nupe religion is still one-sided, based as it is on the doctrine alone, on ideas asserted, taught, and learned as such. Another kind of faith or assurance, less articulate but perhaps more powerful, may spring from the concrete acts of worship, that is, from the psychological stimulations and experiences gained in ritual and other observances. With these the following chapters will deal.

For the moment we need point out only one of the consequences of the Nupe conception of the universe. Clearly, it vouchsafes little certainty or guidance for action. Even the promises of supernatural aid only add to the uncertainties, for as they offer the chance of several trials so they confront the user with the problem of choice, which problem is not always readily solved. But the Nupe universe holds out some promise of certainty and some guidance for action. Both are mechanical and of a case-to-case kind; in other words, they are such as divination can offer. And since this guidance is required both for the problems of everyday life and for the handling of the supernatural tools meant to aid man in these problems, divination becomes a prerequisite, not only of provident action in general, but also of religious actions. It seems logical, therefore, to turn to divination first, and afterwards to ritual, medicine, and to all the other 'supernatural tools'.